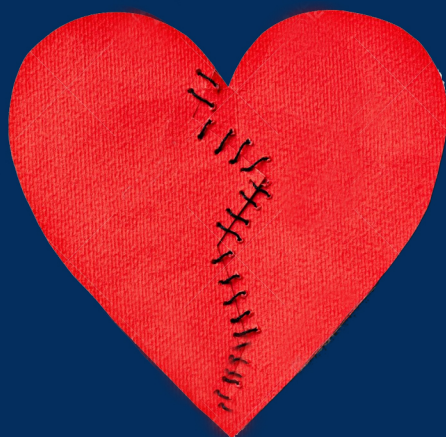


# Stitched Up:

A PRIMER FOR HEALING AFTER  
HEARTBREAK



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**School of Love NYC**  
Let's Get Your Heart Beating Again

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**WHY HEARTBREAK HURTS**

“I am knee deep in heartbreak. I don’t know how to adequately describe the pain, except that it has robbed me of myself. I feel sadness and loss the entire day. Every day, I think of a new kernel of betrayal and it sinks deep and stings. There is a decade of my life that now leaves me confused.”

I wrote this passage in my journal one week after my ex-husband’s sudden disappearance. After a ten year relationship, he simply changed his mind and walked out the door never to be seen again.

At that pivotal moment, I was ill-prepared to understand the emotional journey I was about to undertake. Instead, I focused on putting one foot in front of the other (and attended to the necessary tasks of living). Drowning in sadness, confusion and grief, I could have desperately used a roadmap for the days that lay ahead.

The good news is that heartbreak does pass. And, if properly harnessed, it can be the catalyst for a richer and more rewarding life, healthier love, and greater self-esteem.

In the following chapters, my good friend Aimee Hartstein, LCSW (a relationship therapist) and I write about heartbreak, hoping to provide comfort for those who are cast adrift in a sea of grief due to divorce, a breakup, a betrayal and other relationship chasms.

To start, let us assure you that heartbreak is serious. Below are 5 truths everyone should know:

**1. Heartbreak is one of life’s greatest stressors.**

The emotional toll of love lost cannot be underestimated.

In 1967, psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe studied the correlation between life stressors and illness. The results were published as the Social Readjustment Rating Scale and, unsurprisingly, the three highest-ranking stressors for adults are (1)

death of a spouse, (2) divorce, and (3) marital separation. Take extra care of yourself, as heartbreak has the real capacity to make you sick.

## **2. Heartbreak emotionally hurts.**

Heartbreak hurt in ways that I could not anticipate—both large and small. I worried about being alone. I felt embarrassed to tell my family and friends. Daily rituals that I had taken for granted now left me confused. I was used to shopping and cooking for two; I often cooked more food than I could consume. I slept on the left side of the bed (leaving the other side conspicuously unused) --- a hardwired habit after a decade-long relationship.

A breakup is a trauma on multiple fronts. Aimee, the relationship therapist, said, “Not only are you grieving the dreams and hopes you had for the future, but your day-to-day life has been ripped apart. The habits of a merged life and shared home no longer apply.”

In addition, the heartbroken are forced to confront rejection—one of the most searing human emotions. “We all yearn for love and acceptance. Heartbreak is usually accompanied by shattered self-esteem. We are forced to rebuild our sense of self, including finding ways to love and comfort ourselves instead of getting validation from the outside,” said Aimee.

## **3. Heartbreak physically hurts.**

During a relationship, our brain is flooded with two feel-good hormones: oxytocin (the body’s “love drug”) and dopamine. When a relationship ends, these stress-relieving hormones become depleted. In addition, other stress-related hormones are heightened long-term, leaving individuals particularly susceptible to physiological distress.

“Heartbroken patients often suffer from a litany of aches and pains, including headaches, backaches, neck pain, and stomachaches. In addition, the immune system gets depleted, which leads to a higher likelihood of colds, asthma-attacks and other gastro-intestinal ailments,” said Aimee.

#### **4. Grief has its own timeline.**

I waited optimistically for the 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary of my ex-husband's disappearance to arrive, hoping to feel better. Except, I didn't.

Grieving, I have since learned, has its own timeline. It's a different journey for everyone. And, it often lasts longer than people anticipate.

"Grief is a dance that is one step forward, two steps back," said Aimee. "There are so many moments that may surprisingly knock the breath out of you—a sentimental song playing on the radio, a wedding invitation addressed to the both of you, or the well-intentioned inquiry from a close friend who is unaware of the change in circumstances."

#### **5. Happiness and heartbreak co-exist.**

The good news is that despite the pain of heartbreak, joy and happiness still exist. Post-divorce, I re-discovered so many things that made me smile—solo travel, dinners out with girlfriends, long walks with my beloved dog, and clothing and make-up that made me feel beautiful.

"I encourage patients to do everything in their power to feel better. Ice cream is good. So are massages. Time with friends and family are integral," said Aimee. "When patients are not functioning on a basic level (or wearing out family and friends with their grief), then they should seek professional help."

It's integral to find the silver lining. Six months after my dramatic breakup, I wrote the following, "I'm finally learning to live on my own terms." I could not have asked for a better gift.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**BEHAVIORS TO STOP AFTER A BREAKUP**

Aimee Hartstein, LCSW (a relationship therapist) and I have both survived--and thrived--post-divorce. As a result, we felt it imperative to address the topic of “failure.” Neither of us characterize breakups as “failure,” although they can often feel that way. Instead, we think breakups—if properly leveraged--bring enormous opportunity and blessing.

To harness the upside of defeat, however, we suggest a moratorium on the following 5 habits:

**1. Flogging yourself mercilessly.**

None of us are born with an intuitive understanding of how to be in a relationship. Through trial and error (and a decent number of missteps), we learn how to communicate, fight, and forgive—the cornerstones of happy unions.

When I felt defeated, I reminded myself that it took Thomas Edison 10,000 attempts to create a light bulb. Michael Jordan, who many consider to be one of the greatest basketball players of all time, admits the necessity of failure. He said, “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve almost lost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I have been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

Keep this in mind when mending a broken heart—it may be an integral part of your journey in finding true love.

**2. Maintaining a stoic demeanor.**

The media perpetuates the myth of a “flawless break up”—both parties are amicable, they co-parent perfectly, and neither person needs time or space before effortlessly gliding into their next relationship.

This myth, while poised to sell magazines, is not grounded in truth or reality. Unfortunately, break-ups are traumatic. People need time to grieve. So, tell friends that you are hurting. And, ask them to support you.

“Grief is a natural process and it’s healing. There is nothing bad about crying, feeling depressed and mourning. It’s only problematic when it goes on for an extensive period of time or leaves you unable to function on a day-to-day level,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

### **3. Subscribing to social media’s version of “reality.”**

When you’re feeling depressed (or grieving), it’s wise to limit time on Facebook and other forms of social media. In this “false reality,” everyone’s relationship appears rosy, effortless and perfect.

The reality is that life is messy. Emotions and people are complicated. People fight.

“I advise clients, ‘Don’t compare your inside to someone’s outside,’” said Aimee the relationship therapist. “Facebook portrays an inauthentic reality. The truth is that every one of us is hurt, imperfect or wounded in some way.”

### **4. Playing the blame game.**

Failure is a gift when it forms the basis for self-reflection. All too often, men and women become mired in their version of “truth,” which often means pointing an accusatory finger at their ex. A more productive choice is to look inward—an empowering decision that breaks destructive patterns and helps people avoid repeated mistakes. For example, if your ex told you of their unhappiness, did you fail to take the complaint seriously? Did you shut down any discussion of the relationship and change the subject?

“My healthiest clients take a long, hard look at their own behavior. They figure out patterns (often rooted in childhood) that undermine their chances of success and work diligently to craft a new way of relating,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

### **5. Throwing in the towel.**

Every day, we are saddened by clients who DO FAIL in one of two ways:

- They have given up on love. Beaten by painful breakups, they've stepped off the playing field entirely.
- They keep repeating the same mistakes. Their egos refuse to believe that there is an easier way to achieve the desired result.

Allow yourself to grieve and experience heartbreak. But, don't get stuck in this sadness. There is no defeat in falling down, only in refusing to try again.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**MAKING PEACE IN YOUR HOME ALONE**

“It is the quiet times that are painful. As long as I’m at work or with friends, I am good. But, then there are days like today when I am home alone and it is quiet and the house feels too large for one.”

I wrote the foregoing approximately two months after my ex-husband’s sudden and dramatic disappearance. After nine years of cohabitation, I had forgotten how to live alone. And, in a city where apartments are the size of postage-stamps, I suddenly felt lost in my home.

Below are ten gifts you’ll receive from reclaiming your space solo:

**1. You’ll master new skills.**

Couples, especially over significant periods of time, develop a learned helplessness. My ex-husband vacuumed the floors; I cleaned the bathroom. Once he left, I (embarrassingly) had no idea how to use my Dyson vacuum.

On your own, you’ll have no choice but to master a new skillset.

“Break-ups pull the rug out from under a carefully cultivated life. A wife may be faced with maintaining the yard for the first time. A husband may have to learn to feed a family on a budget. Approach new tasks with openness, curiosity, and humor,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

**2. You’ll discover the flip-side of sadness.**

Fighting, accusations, threats, and alienation often mark the end of a relationship. Conversely, solitude may provide a respite from strife.

Take, for example, a client who reveled in her home’s peace and quiet after she kicked out an emotionally abusive boyfriend. “I once saw a couple fight on the subway,” she said, “and I breathed out a sigh of relief that I didn’t have to deal with that nonsense anymore.”

### **3. You'll find comfort in meditative acts.**

Meditation, while wonderful, often is accompanied by self-judgment. Find other forms of active meditation. Take a long walk in the park. Quietly read a book while sipping a glass of wine. Cultivate peace amidst the daily grind to quiet your mind and tap into your intuitive awareness.

### **4. You'll fuel your passions.**

Couples negotiate two lives. More often than not, they are short on time. Newly single, you have more free time to rediscover interests and hobbies.

“My happiest clients figure out what makes them tick. They surf, learn watercolor painting, study Spanish.” said Aimee. “Indulging in hobbies also has the very important collateral benefit of expanding one’s social-circle with like-minded people.”

### **5. You'll find intimacy & love in other places.**

Many couples, unintentionally, retreat unto themselves. They are comfortable with their partner, and unwittingly disconnect from lifelong friends and family for months (if not years).

“Breakups are a wonderful time to reconnect with people who love you. If it has been a while, mend fences. Good people are overwhelmingly forgiving, especially in the face of a contrite and hurting friend,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

### **6. You'll learn the power of prayer.**

Life can bring you to your knees. Happy people find purpose and meaning even in life’s greatest tragedies. They communicate with their Creator and ask for strength. Regardless of whether you worship Jesus or Allah (or find God in Nature’s beauty), connect to your Higher Power on a daily basis.

### **7. You'll shore up the foundation.**

Relationships are about two people. Resist the urge to point fingers at the ex. Instead, figure out your failings and work actively to improve upon them.

“People who successfully navigate break-ups ask, ‘What could I learn from this?’ Maybe they need to learn how to set boundaries? Or, fix childhood wounds that subconsciously cause them to pick the wrong people? Breakups are a wonderful opportunity to understand and improve upon shortcomings, so as to not repeat the same mistakes again,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

#### **8. You’ll gain perspective.**

After my divorce, I volunteered weekly to cook meals for terminally ill AIDS and cancer patients. I enjoyed camaraderie with like-minded people and escaped briefly from my negative and spiraling thoughts. Do something useful and generous with your skills. You’ll gain needed perspective and strengthen your empathy muscle.

#### **9. You’ll rediscover your sexuality.**

Heartbreak decimates egos and shatters self-esteem. Rediscovering flirtation, romance and attraction work wonders to heal your spirit. Locking eyes with an attractive stranger. Laughing until the late night on a first date. Feeling the electricity of a crush’s hand in yours. A little romance makes you aware that the heart (and soul) does heal.

#### **10. You’ll discover the importance of being your own best friend.**

Becoming comfortable in your own company may be one of the most challenging skills you will ever muster. It may also have the greatest payout.

“When you’re happy alone, you are content. You say ‘no’ to negative people. You close the door on abusive relationships. You feel whole. And, in this state, you will place such a premium on your sanity and peace that you will only welcome happy, healthy and productive relationships into your life,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

## CHAPTER 4

### LEARNING FROM—NOT REPEATING--MISTAKES

Last week, a reader emailed me:

*“I just went through my 4th divorce. Each woman has done the same thing after we take our vows—develop a mental illness, neglect themselves physically, and abuse me emotionally. After all these divorces and broken hearts and ‘you’re too good for me’s,’ I have given up. I’m tired of experiencing the same results, and have shut down emotionally....although I don’t want to be. I feel like I have failed too much and failed those I was supposed to be ‘eternal partners’ with.”*

This email broke my heart. Who hasn’t felt like throwing in the towel after searing failure?

After my own divorce, I was ambivalent about entering into another relationship. A good, wise friend nicknamed me “Trigger Finger,” due to my penchant to flee potential relationships at the faintest whiff of trouble. My ambivalence, like many others, was grounded in fear of failure.

Aimee Hartstein, LCSW and I both believe that while failure is an inherent and integral part of growth, it does not have to signal defeat. Like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, failure is often the catalyst for individuals to shed the old to forge a new, improved life where healthy and productive relationships begin.

Einstein defined “insanity” as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” To avoid this repetition failure, we suggest the following:

#### **1. Engage in vigorous self-examination.**

“Anger is a very normal and healthy part of the breakup process. It’s ok to list your partner’s faults, especially if you’ve been wronged. However, to have a successful relationship, you must look at your own behavior and shortcomings,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

For example, a man with a history of cheating girlfriends may be triggered when his current girlfriend becomes friendly with a male co-worker. His behavior—snooping through her phone, following her secretly, accusing her of wrongdoing without provocation—may create the very estrangement that he feared. Unknowingly, he chips away at the foundation of his relationship due to past, unhealed hurts.

Take a long, hard look at your behavior and how it affected your partner. Be courageous—admit your mistakes and work diligently to improve upon them. Only then do you have a real chance at success.

## **2. Replace assumptions with communication.**

No one is born with flawless communication skills. Effective communication is a discipline—much like exercise and meditation—that must be practiced (and improved upon) daily.

“Over and over, I see couples who make assumptions instead of talking to their partner. For example, a wife will want to talk to her husband about a problem. When he asks for a ‘minute,’ she may incorrectly assume that he is ignoring her or doesn’t care about her problem. In reality, he may be processing his own thoughts from the day. This misunderstanding—essentially a small problem—blows up into a big fight,” said Aimee.

Take big risks in favor of stronger communication. Speak up even if silence feels easier. Tell others when you’ve been hurt. Ask for what you need. Listen to and show empathy for your partner.

## **3. Understand how your history influences your behavior.**

“In childhood, we learn how to relate. We develop good and bad habits. If we are not conscious of the dynamics and roles we play within our family, we may unwittingly repeat destructive patterns because they feel familiar,” said Aimee.

Take, for example, a woman who was raised by a very domineering mother and a weak and passive father. In adulthood, she may be annoyed by a string of underperforming boyfriends who are “unable to get it together.” She may belittle them, irritated by their

failure to “act like men.” On an unconscious level, she is likely picking men who remind her of her father.

To take it a step further, these men also may not be as weak as she imagines, but instead her aggression backs them into a corner. Unbeknownst to her, she is recreating a familiar family dynamic—even though she eschews the result.

Take a detached, unsentimental look at your family. Carry the blessings forward. Leave destructive, unproductive ways of relating behind. This exercise is integral to creating healthier partnerships in the future.

#### **4. Assess the correlation between fear and intimacy.**

Far too many people end up in “lukewarm” relationships. The conversation (if any) isn’t too engaging. The sex is either uninspired or non-existent. Neither person is too thrilled with the other’s looks, personality or intellect.

Most “safe” choices are based on fear. Those who avoid risk inevitably shortchange themselves out of chemistry, intimacy and connection.

“For the possibility of a happy ending, you have to take big risks,” said Aimee the relationship therapist. “You have to pick someone who you feel ‘lucky’ to call yours. This may require stepping outside your comfort zone, risking rejection, and confronting familial or societal expectations in favor of the person who inspires the best in you.”

Last, we’d like to acknowledge the courage and determination it takes to forge a new path. Most of us will cling to old, painful and destructive habits until they become completely intolerable. For example, a woman who continually dates emotionally unavailable men will not take a hard look at herself until she becomes fully sick of the rejected and hurt place where she finds herself again. Be aware that utter disgust and an exaggerated version of the “same old situation” will usually precede monumental growth and health going forward.

## CHAPTER 5

### BROKENHEARTED, NOT BROKE

The end of a relationship is devastating. As hard as it is to wake up and face the day when your emotional life is in chaos, dismantling a shared financial life can further add insult to injury.

For this article, I reached out to Ellen Rogin—a financial advisor with 20-years of experience and *The New York Times* best-selling author of “Picture Your Prosperity.” Having counseled both men and women through traumatic breakups and their financial aftermath, Ellen offers the following 5 strategies to navigate your financial future solo:

#### **1. Shift Your Perspective.**

No matter the circumstances of your breakup, set your mind on developing a resilient attitude. As we’ve said many times throughout this heartbreak series, every hurt provides an opportunity and a gift.

“When people see events happening *for* them and not *to* them, they are better equipped to problem-solve and see the potential for personal growth,” said Ellen. “A failed relationship may be the beginning of a wonderful new chapter. I have seen individuals go back to school to further their education; change jobs to do something more fulfilling; or simply hunker down to understand their finances—all in furtherance of creating a life of independence and self-sufficiency.”

#### **2. Flex Your Gratitude Muscle.**

Along with developing a resilient mental mindset, cultivate a daily gratitude practice. People who are grateful not only experience better health, less stress and improved sleep, but they report increased financial happiness.

“I’ve noticed that over-spenders tend to talk a lot about what they don’t have in their lives. In contrast, good savers are consistently taking time to show gratitude for what they do have. Practicing gratitude consistently has a positive ripple effect in other areas, as well-- reduced materialism, more fulfilling social relationships, and higher optimism

and self-esteem. Feeling prosperous—regardless of your financial situation—tends to attract more goodness into your life. And, this is the definition of true prosperity,” said Ellen.

### **3. Face Your Debt Head-On.**

In Ellen’s book “Picture Your Prosperity,” she tells a story about Jeannie, a thirty-something woman whose live-in boyfriend suddenly decides “it’s not her, it’s him” and moves out. Jeannie stays in the apartment, but redecorates to remove all traces of her ex—quickly racking up credit card debt in the process.

It’s very easy to splurge—buying a new wardrobe, treating yourself to expensive dinners, indulging in facials and massages—to soothe an aching heart. But, if you’re spending more than you earn (or paying the minimum on your credit cards), you’re actually adding to your stress and depression.

“Studies have shown that a 10% increase in credit card debt leads to a 14% increase in depressive symptoms. The short-term ‘high’ you feel when you indulge is quickly replaced by low-grade depression, a loss of appetite and feelings of loneliness,” said Ellen. “Instead, shore up your self-esteem and tackle those things that are frightening you. Get a handle on how much you owe and to whom. Devise a strategy to pay more than the minimum on your credit card bills. Knock out debt with the highest interest rates first. The feeling of satisfaction and self-sufficiency will stay with you much longer.”

### **4. Visualize Your Goals to Prioritize Your Spending.**

While a tightening of the belt may be in order, we also advocate building a life that makes you feel good and that is a reflection of your values. Setting goals both immediate (i.e., a new dress) and long-term (i.e., a vacation in France to study cooking) makes life rich with possibility.

“I encourage clients to use visualization techniques to create inspiring goals,” said Ellen. “People who use visualization are actually strengthening and conditioning their minds. They have a much better chance of making their dreams a reality because they are alert

to opportunities. This ‘dream-time’ is actually a very a powerful tool to create an abundant financial future.”

Plus, compelling goals are a wonderful incentive, making it easier to say “no” to unnecessary expenditures. You’ll make more informed financial decisions that reflect your values and that are in furtherance of your dream life.

### **5. Take Ownership of Your Financial Future.**

In many long-term relationships, one (or both) partners may have been “willfully blind” when it comes to understanding money. While it’s realistic to feel nervous about this subject, don’t allow fear to hamper your ability to get ahead.

“You’d be surprised at how many ‘successful’ professionals have no idea how much they make, let alone how to invest money and save for the future,” said Ellen. “The good news is that fear is often much worse than reality. There are so many resources available that teach how to invest and save money, purchase insurance, and create an estate plan—the building blocks of financial wellness.”

If this seems daunting, consider enrolling in a finance class or enlisting the services of a financial advisor. Whatever you do, commit to using this time of transition wisely and take bold steps to creating your strong financial future.

## CHAPTER 6

### FREEING YOURSELF FORM THE GHOST OF AN EX

My partner, Bill, and I have been together nearly four years. We had our first fight six months into our relationship, and I remember it as if it were yesterday. During a romantic dinner, a minor comment escalated into a full-blown argument. Needing space to calm down and think, he abruptly ended our evening and put me in a cab home—a marked departure from how our dates usually ended. I returned home...and devolved into an emotional tailspin. I was falling in love with Bill and feared I would never hear from him again.

While it may seem preposterous to jump to the conclusion that a “disagreement” would lead to a “disappearance,” I entered our relationship with baggage. Five years previously, without warning or provocation, my ex-husband disappeared. Now, the closer I edged towards falling in love again, the more frightened I became. I wanted to protect myself from being hurt.

Many of us carry wounds from our past relationships. Is it possible to acknowledge a painful past without allowing it to interfere with the blessings of the present? Aimee Hartstein, LCSW (a relationship therapist) and I offer the following tips to free yourself from the ghost of an ex:

#### **1. Allow yourself time to grieve.**

Many people try to get over a failed relationship by immediately beginning a new one. While the lure of a fresh start is enticing, it’s usually a short-lived fix for the ache underneath.

“People need time to grieve,” said Aimee the relationship therapist. “It is nearly impossible to have a new, productive romance unless you’ve allowed yourself the necessary time to heal.”

## **2. Understand your part of the story.**

Each romantic “failure” provides an opportunity and a gift. If you neglect to discover where you can grow and improve, you’ve missed a chance to evolve for the better.

Take, for example, the story of Josie. She dated Tim for eighteen months. During that time, Tim regularly brought up his ex-girlfriend—their favorite restaurants, her love of hip-hop music, and their fabulous vacation in France. Although Josie tired of Tim’s nostalgic musings, she bit her tongue for fear of rocking the boat or causing strife in their relationship.

A few months after her messy breakup with Tim, Josie met Mark. On their second date, Mark casually commented that his ex-girlfriend edited a popular blog. Josie went ballistic and abruptly ended all contact with Mark. She projected her unresolved feelings of anger towards Tim onto Mark—an otherwise suitable and eligible bachelor.

“In Josie’s case, her concerns about Tim were valid. She had a wonderful opportunity to learn how to communicate her needs and set appropriate boundaries. She not only missed a chance to become more self-empowered and a better communicator, but unnecessarily unloaded on Mark—an otherwise innocent and well-intentioned suitor,” said Aimee.

## **3. Give your partner the benefit of the doubt.**

It is easy to leap to conclusions, especially when you’re trying to protect a wounded heart. But, building a fortress around your heart won’t keep it safe. Instead, it will likely deter an open and available partner who has done nothing to earn your distrust.

Sondra is a 34-year old graphic designer. Her parent’s marriage ended in divorce due to her father’s infidelity. In addition, Sondra’s last two boyfriends cheated on her. As a result, she believes that most men are cheaters. When she started dating Nick—a likeable guy with a history of monogamous relationships--she looked for “signs” that he is a cheater, too. Unbeknownst to her, her incessant questions appear controlling and

paranoid. Nick—a man who is otherwise crazy about Sondra—resents having to pay the price for a crime he did not commit.

“If someone is taking you out on dates, introducing you to their friends and contacting you regularly, you must assume the best in their intentions. No one should have to drill through Fort Knox to get to know the real you. Being closed off and angry will prevent you from meeting your real soul mate,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

#### **4. Speak your truth, but do so from a grounded place.**

No matter how well a new relationship is going, something is going to happen—a comment, look or misstatement—that will trigger a painful memory. You will get worried. Is this person starting to exhibit the same traits that caused the demise of your last relationship?

“My advice is to sleep on whatever is bothering you,” said Aimee. “If you wake up with a change of heart, you can drop it. But, if you’re still feeling agitated, voice your concern. But, be open to your partner’s side of the story. Communicate constructively, so you open a dialogue, as opposed to making someone feel defensive. Fights and misunderstandings are natural. Further, they can be very healthy if each party comes to a deeper understanding of the other.”

#### **5. Take proactive measures to keep your anxiety in check.**

After the end of my marriage, I had significant anxiety about dating. While I deeply craved a relationship and intimacy, the prospect felt terrifying. I knew that I needed to conquer my spiraling thoughts. So, I put into place “a system” to help keep my anxiety in check.

First, I enlisted a few close friends (who had intimate knowledge of my past). When I sensed “danger” in my partner’s behavior (that would make me want to leave the relationship), I would call on them to ask for advice. More often than not, my fears were unfounded. But, their opinion and insight were an invaluable comfort.

I also recognized the “triggers” that exacerbated my anxiety. So, I worked diligently to create emotional balance. I made sure to get enough sleep. I exercised daily. I learned to meditate. I minimized my consumption of alcohol and caffeine—both of which make me more edgy.

“Many people suffer from anxiety,” said Aimee. “The good news is that simple steps--practiced daily--have a significant impact on keeping you calm and centered. Creating a healthy life and a mindfulness practice go far to keep baggage in proper perspective.”

**CHAPTER 7**  
**ALONE, NOT LONELY**

Last week, I returned from my 7<sup>th</sup> solo vacation. When I travel alone, strangers often inquire whether I am afraid or lonely. My answer never wavers:

*“I love my alone time. I have adventures. I read books. I tune into my thoughts. I am rarely lonely. Curious strangers always approach me and I have wonderful conversations with interesting people who teach me so much.”*

While my solitude now feels decadent and comforting, it was not always this easy. After my divorce seven years ago, I started traveling alone out of circumstance (rather than choice). I was downright petrified! In fact, during my first solo trip to Argentina, I wrote, “Traveling alone makes me feel uncomfortable. I feel like a freshman in college again—I know nothing and no one. Who will I eat with tonight? I was never good at these moments.”

Despite this discomfort, I took solitude on as a spiritual practice. Now, years later, I believe that being alone (without being lonely) is integral to happiness. While it takes courage to muster, the payout is enormous.

At various points in life, you may have to walk away from a romantic relationship, family drama or friendship turned sour. Your spiritual evolution may require you to separate from the pack. Instead of seeking wisdom from external sources, you will find truth and compassion inside yourself. And, as counter-intuitive as it may appear, finding solace in your solitude will dramatically increase the quality of your relationships whether you’re single or in a committed partnership.

“People who are afraid to be alone sometimes invite mistreatment. Their relationships are often borne of loneliness, fear and desperation. Lovers, friends, and even family may

sense this weakness and overstep boundaries because they intuitively know that this person will never leave,” said Aimee.

Conversely, being comfortable in solitude virtually guarantees that you will never suffer through an abusive relationship again. People comfortable in solitude walk away from unproductive or hurtful relationships. From a place of strength and contentedness, they attract kind, compassionate and loving people into their world.

“Happy people are self-sufficient, engaged with the world, and interested in personal development. It’s impossible to be dependent, clingy or desperate when you’re having fun and feeding your soul. This independence is extremely attractive,” said Aimee.

Before you embark on this journey to embrace solitude, start with three truths:

- Learning to be alone, like any other discipline, requires practice. Don't be daunted if you're uncomfortable at first.
- Solitude, much like meditation, quiets outside distractions. You will tune into your intuition. Your creativity will soar.
- In time, you'll come to relish your “me” time. It’s really quite decadent—you’ll sleep late, read without distraction, and eat your favorite foods without negotiation or compromise. Don’t worry—this “me” time is fleeting. When you've had your fill, you can re-enter your relationships renewed and refreshed.

Here are 5 best ways to get comfortable in solitude:

### **1. Mark it in the calendar.**

Until you fully recognize its value, you may be tempted to overcommit to family, friends and even work obligations to avoid having to sit with yourself. Pick a day each week and block out two hours. This "me" time should be treated with as much sanctity as your most important work meeting. Plan ahead. Indulge in a treat (reading a book with a glass of wine, gardening, salsa lessons) that is uniquely inspiring to you.

## **2. Start small.**

“Would you run 15 miles at your first practice for the marathon? To achieve a lofty goal, develop small, incremental steps that you increase gradually,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

Eat lunch at a restaurant alone. Go to a matinee solo. Take a day-trip to explore a neighboring town. As you get comfortable, you’ll be ready for bigger triumphs--a weekend away or an overseas vacation.

## **3. Bring props, if necessary.**

Despite my experience, I sometimes still experience moments of unease. A good book, newspaper, travel guide, or journal mollifies the discomfort of eating dinner at a restaurant alone. And, these “props” serve a dual purpose—they provide entertainment (for when I want to be alone), but also fodder for conversation (when I am happy to chitchat with a stranger).

## **4. Be open to people & adventure.**

Being alone isn’t about being closed off. In fact, solo adventure usually spawns new friendships and experiences.

During that first solo trip to Argentina, I signed up for a bike tour of Buenos Aires. Coincidentally, my tour group included a classmate of mine from graduate school. Imagine the chances! Years later, we still share a love of international adventure.

When you’re comfortable being alone, you’re remarkably approachable (and intriguing). You’ll make new friends; take a different path; eat something unusual; and have a conversation that forever changes your outlook. Be open and the world will provide riches in abundance.

## **5. Develop comfort in other's discomfort.**

In a society that often measures “friendship” by quantity not quality, the decision to cultivate solitude may be unnerving to others. Expect quizzical inquiries.

Get strong and refuse to allow another person's discomfort (and their projection onto you) to impact your goals. Be ready for the ubiquitous question, “Why are you alone?” Without a trace of defensiveness, state your truth simply and succinctly.

“I enjoy solo adventures,” is a great response.

“If you're confident and positive (and having fun), others will be inspired by your willingness to take an unconventional path. They may even ask you for advice on where to begin their own journey,” said Aimee.

**CHAPTER 8**  
**THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS**

“I pray every day that I will find forgiveness. I pray that I will not be consumed by hatred. I pray to move forward as an open and loving person. I pray that he gets the help he needs.”

I wrote the foregoing a few months after my ex-husband’s sudden and dramatic disappearance. My ex-husband’s betrayal ripped open my world in ways that I could not have imagined. The future—as I had hoped and planned—would be no longer. The past—as I had known it—made little sense.

Aimee Hartstein, LCSW (a relationship therapist) and I both agree that forgiveness is the cornerstone for a new and better life.

Although I prayed from the onset to forgive my ex-husband, nearly four years passed before I was able to forgive him (and myself) in an authentic manner. My journey taught me the following essential truths:

**1. True forgiveness takes time.**

There is no shortcut to forgiveness. In fact, I would caution against handing out pardons too quickly—lest they be inauthentic.

In my case, I needed time to grieve. I sat for what felt like eternity with the uncomfortable emotions of denial, disbelief, rage, and sadness. Once I had accepted my “new normal,” I could begin the work that forgiveness demands.

**2. Forgiveness does not mean that you condone the action.**

“Forgiveness is a release of all anger and resentment against the person who aggrieved you. It means that you pardon your transgressor, not the transgression,” said Aimee the relationship therapist.

While I still lament the manner in which my ex-husband ended our marriage, I harbor no ill-will towards him. In fact, that painful chapter was a blessing that changed my life

for the better. I now choose to live my life on my own terms—and not in reaction to the wrong that was committed against me.

### **3. Forgiveness makes you beautiful.**

Want a beauty secret more powerful than the world’s most expensive elixirs? Let go of resentment.

Several years ago, I knew a woman who continued to grind about her ex-husband 5 years after her divorce. Her ex-husband had remarried, but she remained stuck—complaining (to anyone within earshot) about his poor character, sexual infidelities, and stinginess. I used her as a template of what I hoped to never be.

“Many people hold on to anger because it’s a way to keep the relationship alive,” said Aimee. “But letting go—and releasing that anger—is freeing. Gone are the worry lines, frowns, upset stomachs, tense shoulders and other physiological effects of living in a state of negativity.”

### **4. Leave retribution to the universe.**

Karma is the belief that we are agents of our own happiness and misery. Do good and create your own Heaven. Do bad and design your own Hell.

It’s not your job to teach your transgressor a lesson, so let go of vengeance and spite.

Likewise, be wary of engaging in *schadenfraud*—or delighting in your tormentor’s pain—as, I believe, this also promotes negative energy.

“You might not be able to control being cheated on or treated badly, but you can decide your reaction to it. The best revenge, ultimately, is going forward to live a happy and productive life,” said Aimee.

### **5. Have faith that the Universe is conspiring to deliver your best life.**

Deepak Chopra’s “Seven Laws of Spiritual Success” espouses a theory of detachment, stating, “Today I will commit myself to detachment. I will allow myself and those around me the freedom to be as they are. I will not rigidly impose my idea of how things should be.”

As much as we may want to dictate another person's behavior or a desired outcome, we must cede control. Trust that every heartbreak serves a greater purpose. Perhaps your ex wasn't a good match after all? Or a soul mate—who shares your values—awaits in your future?

“Healthy people realize that life is not guaranteed, but every circumstance—no matter how bleak-- gives an opportunity to evolve to one's highest potential,” said Aimee.

### **6. Forgiveness sows the seeds for empathy.**

Finding empathy for those who have hurt us is a wonderful—and admittedly challenging—practice. In his book “Open Heart, Open Mind,” Buddhist teacher Tsoknyi Rinpoche writes about “empathy meditations”—where you sit and imagine another person's experience fully to understand their suffering. In furtherance of my quest to forgive my ex-husband, I embarked upon this meditative practice.

In the beginning, I was loath to extend compassion to him. So, I resolved to meditate in this manner for two minutes a day. But, with each session, my time meditating (and tolerance) grew.

When I allowed myself to feel his struggles, the anger dissipated. I realized that those who hurt are usually hurting. Before I knew it, I was ready to extend the olive branch.

### **7. Forgiveness is a two-way street.**

While it is easy place blame on others for the ways we've been “wronged,” life is rarely this simple.

“Many of my clients who have been aggrieved also struggle to forgive themselves—for making a bad choice, ignoring the obvious, ‘failing’ again, loving too much, staying too long, or allowing themselves to be mistreated,” said Aimee. “When they have explored all the facets of their grief, they are ready to heal.”

### **8. Forgiveness is freedom.**

Four years after his disappearance, I wrote my ex-husband the following:

*“Almost a year ago, you reached out, offering an explanation. I was not ready to hear what you had to say, and still feel a re-hashing of the past is unnecessary. I do wish, however, that we could forge peaceful forgiveness between us, as hard as that may be.”*

In writing this letter, I felt an enormous weight lift off me. For the first time in years, I felt free from my past and ready to step fully into the present.

**9. Forgiveness is contagious.**

Forgiveness spreads like wildfire when undertaken authentically.

My family and friends harbored anger and resentment towards my ex-husband. Their hatred of him was a malignancy that I feared would undermine their health and happiness. If I was no longer upset—and could express compassion and empathy for my ex-husband—who were they to continue to harbor ill-will? I convinced them to let go of resentment and we collectively looked towards the future with hope and optimism.

**10. Forgiveness paves the way for true love.**

Approximately a month after I had let go, I met my soul mate. Coincidence? I doubt it. My heart was finally ready to feel an intimate connection with another person again.

“It is nearly impossible to move forward until you let go of blame and rage. Healthy relationships are born between healthy people. I advise people to sever the bonds of negativity that keep them tethered to the past,” said Aimee.

**CHAPTER 9**  
**25 WAYS TO BE HAPPIER**  
**(AND WHY YOUR RELATIONSHIP DEPENDS UPON IT)**

I recently stumbled upon a quote by author Tom Robbins that perfectly describes why love often fails:

*“When we’re incomplete, we’re always searching for someone else to complete us. When, after a few years or a few months of a relationship, we find that we’re still unfulfilled, we blame our partners and take up with someone more promising. This can go on and on—series polygamy—until we admit that while a partner can add sweet dimensions to our lives, we, each of us, are responsible for our own fulfillment. Nobody else can provide it for us, and to believe otherwise is to delude ourselves dangerously and to program for eventual failure every relationship we enter.”*

In our work, Aimee and I coach women and men towards more fulfilling love lives. We stress the importance of building a healthy and vibrant life now—regardless of your relationship status. The upside is tremendous:

- Increased energy and vitality.
- Greater self-esteem derived from within, as opposed to external validation.
- A greater propensity to attract like-minded, well-adjusted friends and lovers.
- An increased likelihood of a successful, long-term romantic relationship. By filling your well from a variety of sources, you’re much less prone to be needy, critical or demanding of your partner.

A happy life is built deliberately with care. Below, we offer suggestions. Pick and choose as you please, but be sure to nurture all areas equally.

**Your Body.** People who regularly exercise have increased brain function and lower levels of stress, depression and anxiety. Further, a healthy diet and adequate sleep work perfectly together, increasing the body’s ability to heal itself.

1. Take a 20-minute walk outside.

2. Throw a punch. Dance merengue. Stand on your head. Join a class to meet a community of like-minded people.
3. Give yourself an uninterrupted hour to savor a healthy lunch.
4. Fill up on the cheapest (and healthiest) drink available—water. Add lemon to flush toxins and balance the pH levels in your body.
5. Create a bedtime ritual. Turn off electronics. Enjoy a warm bath, a good book, and a cup of herbal tea to wind down. Indulge in high-quality sheets and pillows.

**Your Heart.** We are born to love and feel. Express compassion, kindness, and empathy. Do so generously and with little expectation of reciprocation. Connect to your Higher Power. Be alert for the magic and mystery in the every day.

6. Listen to a favorite album. Close your eyes. Breathe in an artist's capacity to move you on a visceral level.
7. Hug someone you love with both arms.
8. Find a community (whether it be a church, synagogue, mosque or non-denominational support group) that celebrates the joy of life and uplifts during your darkest hour. Fellowship is powerful.
9. Develop a meditation or prayer practice. Even if you struggle, keep practicing. Five minutes is enough to reap the benefits.
10. Journal. Count your blessings over and over and over—and watch them multiply.

**Your Brain.** I am inspired by Michaelangelo who (at age 87) said, "I'm still learning." Your brain is a muscle, so engage it regularly.

11. Start a book club. Invite 3-4 friends to read, too. Invite them over for take-out food and lively discussion.
12. Challenge yourself to learn a new skill. Screenplay writing. Indian cooking. Watercolor painting. Woodwork. Tai chi. Consistency and desire are powerful forces for growth.
13. Push your boundaries. Visit the Taj Mahal. Eat Peruvian food. Buy kohlrabi and tackle a new recipe.

14. Enroll in school. A friend of mine is studying Astrobiology through Harvard University's online courses. The digital world offers free ways to study from the world's greatest intellectuals.
15. Go to a museum and tour with a docent. You'll learn the story behind the art and the artist, which helps you appreciate it in a whole new way.

**Your Relationships.** The happiest people find love, humor, companionship, empathy and wisdom from a variety of people.

16. Call an old friend—one who lives out of town—to catch up.
17. Send a card to thank someone who made a difference in your life.
18. Reach out to a mentor to ask for advice/insight. Everyone loves to feel that their contributions are valued.
19. Meet friends weekly for coffee, after-work cocktails, a walk in the park, or dinner. Facebook is great, but real relationships need to be nurtured live and in the flesh.
20. Call your mother (or father/brother/sister). In the words of John F. Kennedy, "We must find time to stop and thank the people who make a difference in our lives."

**Your Dharma.** Each of you has a special talent that makes the world brighter.

21. Do something creative every day. Write a poem. Tend a garden. Cook a meal.
22. Work to pursue a noble calling regardless of the fact that it may take years to achieve. Write a book. Start a not-for-profit. Fundraise for your favorite charity.
23. Resolve to change one person's life in a substantial way. Buy a meal for a hungry man. Visit a homebound elderly person. Teach someone to read.
24. Even if your job seems "unfulfilling," do it to the best of your ability. Smile at your customers. Be helpful to colleagues. Even on your worst day, give your best.
25. Call a friend who is hurting. You may be the ear, word of encouragement or display of love that keeps them going another day.

**CHAPTER 10**  
**BUSTING RELATIONSHIP MYTHS**

Who doesn't love a Hollywood romance? As much as I enjoy escapist fantasy, I also understand there is a wide chasm between Tinseltown's version of "truth" and "reality."

People are complicated. Relationships are muddy. If you unknowingly cling to "myths," you may make bad choices. Worse, you may deny yourself the opportunity to experience real (messy) love.

Relationship therapist Aimee Hartstein, LCSW and I speak transparently about love. We feel incumbent to shed light on falsehoods that often leave people feeling like "failures." With a more realistic set of expectations, you'll be guaranteed a better chance at a happy and productive relationship. The 10 untruths are as follows:

**1. I will be happy once I am in a relationship/married/pregnant.**

Happiness is much less predicated on external circumstance than a positive mental attitude (and gratitude for all of life's blessings). Make a mental decision to be your best every...single...day. As said best by James Oppenheim, "A foolish man seeks happiness in the distance; the wise grows it under his feet."

**2. I will instantly know when I meet "The One."**

"People who look for 'a sign' often miss out on wonderful opportunities," said Aimee the relationship therapist. "Many of the happiest relationships spring out of unlikely circumstances, including long friendships where chemistry was not immediately present. Remain open to possibilities and you might be surprised about the person with whom you fall in love."

**3. The right relationship is easy.**

No matter how wonderful your partner, good relationships (especially over time) require work. You will forgive big hurts. You will work to create romance and a connection. You will speak kindly when you feel like screaming.

Growing in service to the relationship may mean exhibiting empathy, patience and generosity when you feel like throwing in the towel. The payoff to all this diligence and self-sacrifice? You will grow spiritually by leaps and bounds.

#### **4. Happy couples don't fight.**

“This myth is incredibly damaging,” said Aimee the relationship therapist. “The absence of disagreement means either one or both people are swallowing their own needs, failing to set boundaries, and building in resentment. A lack of disagreement should not be the goal. Instead, healthy couples must aim to fight fair. They do so to move the relationship forward and not for sport.”

#### **5. All we need is love.**

Plenty of couples “in love” are completely mismatched. A relationship with the right person is much better than one with any person.

Pick a partner who is kind and generous. Find someone with compatible values and financial habits. Watch for red flags--untreated addictions, character flaws, or a propensity towards jealous or controlling behavior. Love grows when each person recognizes that they are responsible for their individual happiness.

#### **6. My partner is my everything. We should spend all our free time together.**

All too often, dissatisfied couples disappear into a black hole unto themselves.

Conversely, happy couples create a vibrant world filled with friends, family, and outside hobbies. When you have a variety of sources to fill your emotional needs, you'll be much less likely to put burdensome pressure on your partner. So, go ahead and make a date with your friend...it will strengthen your romantic partnership.

#### **7. Happy couples have sex [x] times a week.**

“As long as each partner feels their needs are being fulfilled, there is no magic number to the amount of sex a couple should be having,” said Aimee. “Many people are perfectly content in a low-sex partnership. It's a personal choice.”

**8. My soul mate will automatically understand what I need and want.**

Communication is the cornerstone of productive relationships. If you're the silent type, commit to working diligently to voice your thoughts (lest you drown in unmet expectations and a sea of resentment.) Couples must talk—to establish boundaries, give each other clues as to how to “win,” and set priorities.

**9. Getting married (or having a baby) will save this relationship.**

“If you and your partner are at each other's throats, trust me, a deeper psychological and financial commitment will only add fuel to the fire,” said Aimee the relationship therapist. “Piling bad decision upon bad decision not only prolongs the inevitable, but may make the break up all the more complicated.”

**10. If I work hard enough, I can make this relationship work.**

A long relationship does not necessarily equal a successful relationship. A breakup may be the best solution for a couple who is truly incompatible. Plus, if approached with honesty, kindness and empathy, both partners are now free to find someone who truly makes them happy.

“Hours and hours of work cannot save a relationship between incompatible people,” said Aimee. “That time and energy is better spent on understanding and improving yourself so that you can make better choices—from a much more self-empowered place—the next time around.”

## APPENDIX

### 7-Day Meditation to Heal Heartbreak

*Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable.*

*-C.S. Lewis*

Filled with darkness, loss and sorrow, the journey through heartbreak is hard, unbearably difficult. Everywhere, heartbreak is evident:

- A husband leaves without explanation;
- A girlfriend betrays your trust;
- A crush goes unrequited;
- Two people madly in-love realize that they want different things for the future.

I am no stranger to heartbreak, having survived my ex-husband's sudden disappearance and the secrets and betrayals I unearthed in the years following. I emerged from the other side of that journey with a sense of gratitude. Had I not traveled this path, I would not be the woman that I am today.

It takes an enormous amount of fortitude, diligence and discipline to not let life's losses break you. I offer this meditation on heartbreak, in hopes of providing a roadmap on loss. These lessons are aimed to provide healing and comfort that you are not alone.

**It takes 21-day to form a habit. Do a daily meditation per day for the next 7 days. Repeat this cycle 3 times.**

I hope that you'll join me in the belief that life's toughest heartbreaks are a catalyst for a better, more enriching life.

## **Day 1: Cry**

I am not sure when tears got such a bad rap. Too many people stifle their tears, embarrassed by their emotional response to hurt, pain, anger or frustration.

Suppression of negative emotions, I believe, can lead to physiological ailments. People who repress sadness and grief are more likely to self-medicate, abusing alcohol, drugs, sex or other distractions.

Crying stimulates the production of endorphins, our body's natural pain killer. Crying not only makes us feel better, but allows for physical detoxification. Tears actually heal the heart.

### **Exercise:**

Allow yourself to grieve. Spend a few minutes today, submitting to uncomfortable emotions related to loss, grief, anger and sadness. If tears come, give yourself permission to cry. Do not judge yourself for any reaction you may have.

## **Day 2: Find small moments of pleasure.**

During the grieving process, the simple act of getting through the day takes extreme effort. Your mind spins with repetitive negative thoughts. You feel like crying. Putting one foot in front of the other takes extreme effort.

Yet, joy can exist harmoniously with despair. The key is to find the beauty in everything. Challenge yourself to notice every moment of levity no matter how small. Express gratitude to the universe. Make a list of the things that make you smile, including.

- ✓ A friend reaches out to say that they are thinking of you.
- ✓ The warmth and fragrance of a cup of tea.
- ✓ A floral arrangement composed of beautiful colors and a variety of scents.
- ✓ A beautiful song makes you sway a little side-to-side.

In one of my favorite books, "Happy for No Reason," Marci Shimoff states that when we register everything positive that happens to us, we actually re-train our brain to find the good in life.

Exercise:

Make a mental list of 5 things that inspire you today. Write down this list before you go to bed. Allow yourself to ruminate on these positive emotions for at least ten minutes before you close your eyes to sleep. Take time to feel your joy again at each small gift. Express thanks for each small moment of peace and happiness.

**Day 3: Choose light.**

In the throes of heartbreak, you will face an intellectual choice: succumb to pain and anger or transcend it. You must make a conscious and deliberate choice on a daily-- perhaps even hourly-- basis. Commit to walking with dignity, pride and class.

If your ex has cheated on you or moved forward quickly with a new love, you will likely struggle with feelings of rage. You may want to physically hurt him/her, so that they can experience the pain you are being forced to endure. You may want to tell everyone within earshot of the ways in which you were wronged. You may displace your anger on the coffee barista, the person driving ahead of you or that irritating colleague.

Don't.

Revenge is ugly. You are beautiful and light.

The decision to rise above the present circumstances is made entirely with your head, but executed fully with your heart. Allow yourself to feel and process negative emotions. Also, commit to learning from your mistakes so that you may move forward smarter and better for the experience.

Exercise:

**Week 1:** Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the center. On one side, list the benefits of acting vengeful, spiteful, and destructive in reaction to your pain. On the other side, list the benefits of behaving with dignity, class and pride in reaction to your pain.

Which is more beautiful and inspiring to you? What choice will you make?

**Week 2:** Write a letter to your ex. Allow yourself to feel and say all the negative emotions that you may otherwise suppress. Write until your hand is exhausted and your soul has been cleansed. Detail your version of events and how you feel about your relationship. When you're finished, burn the letter and release all the negativity into the universe. Let it go.

If you feel motivated, box up all cards, gifts, notes or mementos that remind you of your ex. Put the box in the back of the closet.

**Week 3:** Turn inward. Write in your journal what you have learned as a result of this relationship. Were there red flags you missed? Are there things you would do differently going forward? In what areas do you need to grow? Allow yourself to write and feel until your hand is tired and your soul has been cleansed.

#### **Day 4: Nourish your body.**

The business of grieving is hard work. When I feel down, I usually veer in one of two directions:

- ✓ Eat nothing. Allow the muscles and strength that I have worked hard to gain waste away;
- ✓ Eat everything. Consume as many carbohydrates, simple sugars, fried foods and chocolates as possible. Double down on alcoholic drinks, too.

Neither option is very kind to my body. And, both roads just add shame and guilt to an already heavy load of difficult emotions.

Now is a time to nourish, hydrate and care for your body. Fill your tank with fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains. Be mindful of your body's tendency to crave sugar in all forms (simple carbohydrates, alcohol, candy, packaged snack food). Believe it or not, sugar has been linked to an increase in depression and anxiety—two conditions you are diligently working to avoid.

#### **Exercise:**

Today, lovingly purchase or prepare a healthy, nutrient-dense, colorful meal. Enjoy this meal in silence. Unplug from all electronics, music and distraction. Chew slowly. Put

down your fork after every bite. Focus on the flavors, texture, scent and colors of your food. Notice when you feel full. Take note of your emotional and mental state after you have finished.

### **Day 5: Exercise.**

Today's prescription is one of the most vital to your continued healing. It is also one of the most difficult to practice diligently. But, the payout well-exceeds any effort.

Exercise.

When you most feel like curling up in the fetal position with a pint of Ben & Jerry's, you have to fight against the impulse to wither. Our bodies are meant to move. Exercise allows us to sweat, release muscular tension, and process our difficult emotions. Through this effort, we naturally produce serotonin and endorphins—the body's feel good chemicals that help fight off depression and anxiety. Exercise also boosts our immunity, keeping us healthy when our body otherwise feels under assault.

Exercise:

Today, dedicate yourself to at least 20 minutes of physical activity. Find an activity that you enjoy—running, biking, swimming, walking, yoga, weight lifting, and gardening are all good—and throw yourself into it. Give yourself this time to be alone and to process your thoughts and emotions. Record how you feel both before and after the effort is expended.

### **Day 6: Friendship is Love.**

Aristotle said, "In poverty and other misfortunes of life, true friends are a sure refuge. They keep the young out of mischief; they comfort and aid the old in their weakness, and they incite those in the prime of life to noble deeds."

We are social creatures and thrive when we feel companionship, camaraderie and support from people who understand us and care about our wellbeing.

Mark Vernon is author of "The Philosophy of Friendship." He suggests taking the lead from Aristotle and spending at least a fifth of our time with friends. "Is this not what children do in their persistent requests to play with their friends?" he asks.

Exercise:

Connect with an old friend who has always been supportive and upbeat. Meet for coffee or a meal. If they are far away, catch up over the phone or Skype.

Engage in substantive conversation, as this builds the bonds of friendship. Allow your friend to see your vulnerability and hurt. Share what has been happening in your life, including your break-up, in a real way.

Remember that to have a friend, you must be a friend. Cultivate an honest and sincere interest in their life. Ask about their significant other, children, job and interests. Listen and express concern over what may be troubling them. Buoy their spirits with a compliment, funny story or encouraging word.

**Day 7: Indulge in Your Favorite Passions**

Life is meant for the living. In the midst of devastating heartbreak and loss, you still have an obligation to make yourself happy. Now is the time to tend to pastimes and hobbies that bring you joy. Don't have any? Look back and remember what made you smile as a child and pick up those hobbies again. By doing so, you release serotonin and dopamine, which elevate your mood and fight off depression and anxiety. So go ahead and play!

Exercise:

Give yourself ample time to indulge in playtime. Do something just for you that makes you smile. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as it's uplifting (and healthy). Some common ideas include:

- Taking a cooking class;
- Watching a matinee at the movie theater;
- Attending a sporting event;
- Walking among the flowers at a Botanical Garden;
- Curling up with a cup of tea and a good book;
- Dancing to your favorite music;
- Signing up for salsa lessons.

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